

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 156354 TOSEC 050123

EXDIS

FOLL REPEAT STATE 156354 ACTION DAMASCUS 02 JUL 75:

QUOTE

O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SY SREF

SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWS

FOR AMBASSADOR

1. WE ASSUME THAT IN YOUR INITIAL TALKS WITH ASAD AND KHADDAM AFTER YOUR RETURN FROM U.S., SUBJECT OF SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY LIKELY TO ARISE. WE FEEL THAT YOU SHOULD IN ANY CASE RAISE IT IN LOW-KEY FASHION WITH ASAD. HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN TOLD BY KHADDAM OF LATTER'S STRONG IMPRESSIONS DERIVED FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCES HERE, AND WE SHOULD TRY TO PUT THESE IN BETTER PERSPECTIVE. THIS TELEGRAM CONTAINS SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR POINTS YOU MIGHT MAKE, BUT WE DO NOT INTEND TO TIE YOU DOWN. WE RECOGNIZE DELICACY OF ISSUE AND THAT YOU MUST WORK IT INTO DISCUSSION ON RANGE OF QUESTIONS. MAIN POINT IS TO
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GET ACROSS TO SYRIAN LEADERSHIP, WITHOUT APPEARING TO BE-

LABOR THE SUBJECT, THAT THIS ISSUE CONTINUES TO CONSTITUTE REAL PROBLEM FOR BOTH OF US, HOWEVER UNJUSTIFIED THEY MAY THINK IT IS. WE SHOULD DO WHAT WE CAN TO ENCOURAGE SOME POSITIVE STEP BY SYRIANS TO HELP REASSURE INTERESTED GROUPS IN U.S. SINCE KHADDAM PARTICULARLY, BUT ALSO ASAD, ARE AWARE OF THE ISSUE ALREADY, YOU WILL WANT TO HANDLE IT LIGHTLY ENOUGH TO AVOID THE SORT OF NEGATIVE REACTION THAT WOULD HAVE THE WRONG EFFECT IN THE END.

2. MOST NATURAL APPROACH TO SUBJECT WOULD PRESUMABLY BE YOUR RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON, TALKS WITH SOLARZ AND JEWISH LEADERS, AND CLEAR EVIDENCES OF CONTINUING CONCERN ON PART OF JEWISH COMMUNITY HERE REGARDING CO-RELIGIONISTS IN SYRIA. SOLARZ ET AL RESOLUTION AND JUNE 25 SUB-COMMITTEE HEARING POINTED UP AGAIN CONNECTION BETWEEN THIS SENTIMENT AND U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS, MOST IMMEDIATELY IN AID FIELD.

3. YOU WILL OF COURSE WANT TO MAKE CLEAR THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE SYRIANS REGARD THIS AS INTERNAL AFFAIR. NEVERTHELESS, AS SYRIAN LEADERS NO DOUBT REALIZE, IT IS COMMON AND UNDERSTANDABLE FOR ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS OR NATIONAL GROUPS IN U.S. AND ELSEWHERE TO BE ACTIVELY CONCERNED ABOUT WELL-BEING OF THEIR FELLOWS IN OTHER COUNTRIES. U.S. HISTORY REplete WITH EXAMPLES (IRISH, E.G.).

4. IN CASE OF SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, AS KHADDAM WILL APPRECIATE AFTER HIS VISIT, NORMAL CONCERNS HERE ARE HEIGHTENED BY MISUNDERSTANDING AND IGNORANCE OF TRUE CONDITIONS IN SYRIA. RESULTING ACTIVITY IN CONGRESS AND ELSEWHERE NO LESS A PROBLEM FOR BOTH OUR COUNTRIES, HOWEVER, IF ANXIETIES ON WHICH IT IS BASED ARE EXAGGERATED.

5. YOU MIGHT MENTION THAT IN YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ YOU FOUND HIM ONE OF MOST REASONABLE AND SINCERE OF THOSE ACTIVE ON THIS ISSUE, ENTIRELY MOTIVATED BY CONCERNS OF HIS CONSTITUENCY. WE TALKED WITH HIM AFTER JUNE 25 HEARING AND HE MENTIONED HOW MUCH HE HAD VALUED HIS VISIT TO ARAB COUNTRIES IN FEBRUARY. HE SAID HE HAD KNOWN CERTAIN AMOUNT ABOUT ISRAEL BUT LITTLE OR NOTHING ABOUT ARAB POINT OF VIEW. VISIT HAD BEEN EXTREMELY INFORMATIVE IN THIS RESPECT AND HE WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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LOOKING FORWARD TO CONTINUING PROCESS IN NEXT VISIT. THIS SORT OF INTERCHANGE IS MOST IMPORTANT FOR BOTH OUR COUNTRIES.

6. MISUNDERSTANDINGS ASIDE, HOWEVER, IT MUST BE SAID THAT FACTS DO EXIST THAT GIVE RISE TO PROBLEMS. JEWISH LEADERS IN U.S. ARGUE THAT SYRIA IS ONLY ARAB COUNTRY THAT DOES NOT PERMIT ITS JEWISH CITIZENS TO EMIGRATE. THIS

IS HARD FOR US TO ANSWER. AS REFLECTED IN UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, EMIGRATION IS WIDELY CONSIDERED TO BE A RIGHT PEOPLE SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO EXERCISE. WE FEAR THAT THIS ISSUE IN PARTICULAR WILL HAVE INCREASING IMPACT ON CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD AID, AND MAY WELL DERAIL ANY SYRIAN PROGRAM FOR FY 76. WE RECOGNIZE THAT OUR AID PROGRAM IS NOT MAJOR ELEMENT IN SYRIAN ECONOMIC PICTURE; WE ASSUME SYRIAN GOVERNMENT UNDER-

STANDS IT IS SYMBOLIC OF U.S. DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLES OF OUR TWO COUNTRIES. IN THIS SENSE, IT WOULD BE REGRETTABLE IF IT COULD NOT BE CONTINUED. WE WOULD HOPE THAT, IN SAME SPIRIT OF SEEKING CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TWO PEOPLES, SYRIAN GOVERNMENT COULD TAKE SOME STEP THAT WOULD HELP RELIEVE CONCERNS OF U.S. JEWISH COMMUNITY.

7. IF YOU JUDGE IT USEFUL, YOU MIGHT SUGGEST AS EXAMPLE LIMITED REUNION OF SMALL NUMBER OF JEWISH FAMILIES WHO HAVE CLOSE AMERICAN CITIZEN RELATIVES AND WHO WISH TO COME TO U.S. NUMBER OF PEOPLE INVOLVED--PARENTS, BROTHERS SISTERS AND IMMEDIATE FAMILIES--IS SMALL, PERHAPS 60 PERSONS. YOU MAY SAY WE BELIEVE WE CAN BE REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT ALL OR NEARLY ALL WILL STAY IN U.S. WHEN ONCE HERE. IN THE END, IT MIGHT BE THAT NUMBER WOULD CHOOSE TO REMAIN IN SYRIA, AS WE UNDERSTAND WAS THE CASE WHEN IRAQ PERMITTED JEWS TO LEAVE IN MID-1973. THIS WOULD ONLY CONFIRM WHAT SYRIA HAS CONTENTED ALL ALONG.

8. FYI. EXEMPLARY OF PROBLEMS WE MAY FACE WITHOUT SOME SYRIAN STEP WAS REACTION TO OUR PRESENTATION JUNE 25 IN HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE. SAUNDERS ARGUED IN HIS HEARING STATEMENT (POUCHED TO YOU) THAT SINCE THERE WERE POSITIVE CONFIDENTIAL

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TRENDS BOTH IN SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD MAJOR ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM AND IN SITUATION OF SYRIAN JEWS, CONGRESS SHOULD NOT TAKE RETROGRADE STEP OF CUTTING OF AID. IN DETAILED DISCUSSION IN CLOSED SESSION, SOLARZ RESPONDED THAT SINCE DECEMBER THERE HAS BEEN NO FURTHER ILLEGAL EMIGRATION THROUGH FORFEITURE OF BOND. HE THOUGHT THIS MEANT SARG HAD PLUGGED THIS GAP, LEAVING US AT SQUARE ONE ON EMIGRATION. IT SEEMED CLEAR AT END OF HEARING THAT UNLESS THERE WERE SOME REASSURING EVIDENCE THAT POSITIVE TREND IN FACT CONTINUED, AID WOULD HAVE THIN TIME IN FY 76. END FYI. INGERSOLL UNQUOTE

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